

1. (Amended Three Times) In an online comparison system, a method of ranking prospective merchants comprising:

receiving information related to a potential consumer purchase;

receiving a plurality of merchant comparison information data for a plurality of merchants capable of completing the potential consumer purchase, the merchant comparison information data for a merchant organized into a plurality of categories, wherein the merchant comparison information data includes non-opinion data from at least two categories from: price category, product availability category, product inventory category, time to deliver product category, payment terms category, payment method category, merchant creditworthiness category, and inventory category information;

entering a set of weighting factors prior to receiving information related to a potential customer purchase, the weighting factors corresponding to the categories of merchant comparison information data;

calculating a respective merchant data weight resultant value by multiplying [the] a weighting factor from the entered set of weighting factors against the merchant comparison information data of the corresponding merchant data category;

calculating an aggregate score for the merchant by summing the calculated merchant data weight resultant values; and

ranking merchants based on the merchant aggregate score.

5. (Amended Three Times) The online comparison system of claim 1, further comprising:

requesting weighting factor information from a consumer;

using the consumer entered weighting factor information in the calculation of the respective merchant data weight [result] resultant value.

10. (Amended Three Times) A system of providing comparisons between at least two products, comprising:

means for receiving a search query for a product;

means for retrieving from a database information on merchants offering to sell the product specified in the search query;

means for retrieving from a database merchant comparison information relating to the specified product and the merchants offering the specified product, the merchant comparison information specifying objective, non-opinion data on the specified product or the merchant offering the specified product;

[means for applying screening factors to the retrieved merchant and product information to remove those merchants from the ranking which correspond to the screening criteria;]

means for entering weighting factors corresponding to merchant and product information;

means for multiplying weighting factors against the corresponding retrieved merchant and product information;

means for calculating a merchant aggregate value from the multiplying of the weighting factors against the corresponding merchant and product information;

means for generating a ranking of the merchants based on the merchant aggregate value;

means for applying screening factors to the retrieved merchant and product information to remove those merchants from the ranking which correspond to the screening criteria; and

means for providing the ranking to a consumer.

14. (Amended Three Times) A method of ranking prospective merchants in an online comparison system, comprising the steps of:

receiving information relating to a user specified product;

retrieving a list of merchants from a database, wherein the list of merchants includes merchants offering the user specified product;

retrieving merchant specific information about the merchants in said list of merchants, said merchant specific information including a plurality of merchant data entry values, the merchant data entry values specifying non-opinion data;

entering a set of weighting factors, wherein the entering occurs prior to receiving information relating to a user specified product;

applying weighting factors to said merchant specific information, said application including:

for a plurality of data entry values, multiplying at the data entry value by at least one weighting factor from set of weighting factors to calculate a merchant data weight resultant value;

summing a plurality of merchant data weight resultant values to calculate a merchant aggregate score

ranking said list of merchants carrying the user specified product based on the calculated merchant aggregate scores.

36. (Amended Three Times) A method of ranking merchants in an online comparison system, comprising:

entering a set of weighting factors, the weighting factors corresponding to categories of merchant comparison information, wherein the weighting factor is entered as a numerical value and represents the relative importance given the corresponding merchant comparison information in ranking the merchants;

entering a query specifying a product or service;

retrieving merchant comparison information data from a database, the retrieved merchant comparison information data corresponding to the entered query, the merchant comparison information excluding opinion data or survey result data;

calculating a merchant score by

multiplying a weighting factor by a corresponding data value from the retrieved merchant comparison information to calculate a weighted category score;
summing the weighted category scores to calculate a merchant overall score;
and
ranking the merchants according to the calculated merchant overall score.

39. (Amended Three Times) A method of ranking merchants in an online comparison system, comprising:

selecting a weighting factor, the weighting factors corresponding to merchant comparison information;

entering a query specifying a product or service;

retrieving merchant comparison information from a database, the retrieved merchant comparison information corresponding to the entered query;

calculating a merchant score by:

(i) multiplying the selected weighting factor by a data value from the retrieved merchant information to calculate a weighted category score, and

(ii) summing the weighted category scores to calculate the merchant score;

and

ranking the merchants according to the calculated merchant score,

wherein the retrieved merchant comparison information excludes information obtained from surveys or specifying the opinion of a person.

RESPONSE

Claims 1-7, 10-16, 20-23, 27-28, 30 and 36-47 are pending in the present application.